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The devastating atomic history of Christmas Island

The British nuclear weapon tests on Kiritimati Island had profound and lasting cultural consequences for both atomic veterans and local islanders, writes **Becky Alexis-Martin**



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A British troop carrier flying over Christmas Island in 1956 (*Dennis Hobbs/RAF*)



on Watson was just 17 when he experienced his first nuclear weapon blast. A British soldier from **Cambridgeshire**, he had completed his training in the summer of 1957 before departing on that fated tour with the Royal Engineers on Boxing Day. After the excitement of leaving on a specially chartered train, “all thousand of us”, and then sailing across the oceans, he was wholly unprepared for what awaited him in the tropics.

The now 79-year-old tells me, over a cup of tea in my office, that the first thing to strike him was an unbelievably bright light. “I had my back to the explosion,” he continues. “My eyes closed with my hands covering them. I clearly saw the bones in my hand, just like you see them if you look at the results of an X-ray.”

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